

“Our research informs policy and practice to ensure a well-prepared workforce that will meet the needs of those with chronic conditions, disabilities, and dementia.”

Joanne Spetz, PhD, FAAN
Director, UCSF Health Workforce Research Center on Long-Term Care



INSIGHTS

What is your center's impact?

Our research has been cited in federal and state policy deliberations about nursing home regulations, home- and community-based services, training requirements for personal care aides, and gerontology education for health professionals. We also have close relationships with state policy leaders in the development and evaluation of programs to improve long-term services and supports through Medicaid programs and other regulations. We consulted with state and local public health officials to guide emergency COVID-19 responses focused on workforce preparation and have continued to work with those agencies to support the workforce for the long-term. Two of our most frequently-cited studies drew attention to current shortages of long-term care workers in rural communities and projected deepening shortages across the nation for many long-term care occupations. We publish our results in policy briefs, communicate with journalists, and testify before Congress and state legislatures to make sure our results are heard and can advance solutions to critical long-term care workforce challenges.

What do you foresee as the most pressing workforce challenges in your center's domain over the next 10 years?

Growing demand for long-term care services, new care models, rising long-term care costs, and current and projected shortages of long-term care workers create an urgent need for new workforce research and policy development. There is a rapidly increasing proportion of older Americans and people with disabilities who require long-term care, both at home and in the community. Rising rates of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, people with multiple chronic conditions and frailty, and social isolation are colliding with a shortage of people prepared and ready to work to provide long-term care services. Professionals who work as nursing assistants and personal care aides are in particularly short supply, because their jobs offer low wages, minimal benefits, challenging working conditions, a lack of training, and few career growth opportunities. These issues span multiple settings, which are addressed in our body of research.

What future opportunities do you see to support the health workforce?

There is an urgent need for state and federal action to address the challenges faced by long-term care workers and the factors that drive the critical shortages we face. Professionals who work in long-term care settings need workplace protections such as guaranteed sick time, improved wages, expanded access to the earned income tax credit, and infrastructure to prevent injuries on the job. Reimbursement of long-term care services are too low to support higher wages for workers who often live in poverty and are reliant on safety-net programs to support their families. Similarly, primary care and geriatrics clinicians find it difficult to fully meet the needs of their patients in the face of low reimbursements for the complex services they provide. These issues are even more challenging in rural areas and low-income communities, where shortages are worse and access to high-quality care is problematic.



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The UCSF Health Workforce Research Center on Long-Term Care (UCSF HWRC) is a dynamic hub of policy-oriented research and investigation, whose mission is to help answer the question: Is our health care workforce prepared to meet the growing long-term care (LTC) needs of the aging US population? Our research includes the workforce in nursing homes, home health care, adult day care, community-based settings, and home settings, and includes all LTC occupations.

FEATURED RESEARCH

Personal Care Aides in Rural America: A Scarce Workforce Faced With Unique Pressing Challenges

Personal Care Aides (PCAs) play a vital role in ensuring that the increasing number of individuals with disabilities living in rural areas can remain in their homes and communities by receiving assistance with activities such as dressing and bathing. In a mixed-methods project looking at PCA worker needs, we asked 2 questions:

1. What is the distribution of the population of US adults who report having a self-care disability and might need a PCA worker?
2. What is the distribution of PCA workers in the US and how does it match to areas with the greatest need for self-care?

We partnered with a Rural Disability Institute and used data from the American Community Survey to address both of these questions.

We found a mismatch in several areas of the country where the disability rates are high and workers are more scarce.

We then asked PCAs living in rural areas to describe their work by taking photos. We interviewed them to learn the challenges and successes they face in their work as illustrated in their photos. Interviewees reported satisfaction on the relational part of their job and found joy in the work. However, challenges of "ruralness" included long driving distances, limited rural resources including internet connectivity, and lack of policy recognition of the unique rural challenges in this work.

Findings from this project were published in a special issue of *Health Affairs* on disability, presented in a journal symposium and book club, and presented in 2 consumer-focused story maps that were widely disseminated on websites.

This project is useful to policy makers in highlighting what we already knew was a greater need for PCA workers in rural areas. State and national policy makers can design focused solutions for these areas to address the unique challenges of training and workforce recruitment in rural areas.

LONG-TERM CARE SUMMARY

-  **51** Projects
-  **45** Reports/Briefs
-  **25** Articles
-  **160** Presentations